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ABSTRACT

Coverage in a sample of ten Indiana daily newspapers was analyzed, documentary evidence was gathered, and interviews with surviving newswriters were conducted to determine how the Indiana press reported the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s. The study found that Indiana papers gave the Klan, while it was powerful, more favorable coverage than unfavorable coverage. During the early 1920s, 30% of the Klan-related articles were favorable, 20% were unfavorable, and the rest were neutral. In addition, the favorable articles were given greater play in the papers than the unfavorable articles. After 1925, when the Klan was declining in size and political strength, 33% of the Klan-related articles were unfavorable to it and only one percent was favorable, with the unfavorable articles receiving greater play than the favorable articles. The study shows that there were compelling reasons for not challenging the Klan, including fear of violence and economic reprisals. It concludes that even though Indiana newswriters on the whole did not oppose the Klan while it was powerful, they acted in a reasonable fashion for people more interested in self-preservation than in living up to the ideal that newspapers should be motivated solely by considerations of public welfare. (Author/RL)

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THE HOOSIER NEWSMAN AND THE HOODED ORDER:

INDIANA PRESS REACTION TO THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE 1920s*

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The Ku Klux Klan and the American press of the 1920s were, in a sense, meant to be adversaries. The Klan in that decade encompassed millions of members and it wielded great political power.[1] It appealed in part to its members' sense of fraternity; but it appealed more, like its Reconstruction-era predecessor, to their bigotry. And, like the old Klan of the South, it was used as an agency of social control.

Its members, hidden behind weird hoods and robes, marched in great parades and burned enormous fiery crosses--partly to strike fear in those they opposed: Catholics, Jews, Negroes and persons deemed by the Klan to have strayed from the path of righteousness. And, at times, Klansmen took the law into their own hands, and tarred and feathered, or beat, or branded, or worse.

American newsmen of that time, on the other hand, saw themselves as defenders of the public--which should have placed them squarely against the Klan. The Canons of Journalism, drawn up by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923, stated in the very first article: "The right of a newspaper to attract and hold readers is restricted by nothing but considerations of public welfare.[2]

History is unclear on how well newsmen met this standard in their reaction to the Klan. David Chalmers, in Hooded Americanism, said that some newspapers during the 1920s were conscientious and courageous in reporting the Klan, but that on the whole, "the press explained it partially and poorly, and often not at all ..."[3]

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Silas Bent, on the other hand, wrote in Newspaper Crusades: "In no public issue have the newspapers of this country exhibited sounder editorial sense than in regard to the Ku Klux Klan. In few instances have they worked more effectively and boldly for the general good."[4]

This study investigated how newspapers in Indiana reacted to the 1920s Klan, and why they reacted as they did. Indiana is an especially appropriate state in which to conduct such a study because the Klan in Indiana during the 1920s was probably stronger than in any other state.[5]

This study found that, while the Klan was powerful, Indiana newspapers on the whole treated it cautiously, more often giving it favorable coverage than unfavorable coverage. The study also found that Indiana newsmen had compelling reasons for not challenging the Klan, including fear of Klan violence and economic reprisals.

The study is divided into four parts. Part one gives gives a brief history of the Ku Klux Klan, focusing on the Klan in Indiana. Part two describes the methodology of a content analysis used to determine how Indiana papers reacted to the Klan. Part three gives the results of the content analysis. And part four presents historical evidence that pertains to why Indiana papers reacted to the Klan as they did, including the stories of what happened to some Indiana newsmen who opposed the Klan.

PART I: The Historical Background

The Ku Klux Klan was born in December 1865, when some ex-Confederate officers decided to form a secret society to amuse themselves. They disguised themselves in sheets and pillowcases and galloped about during the night--and found that such antics had the unexpected result of scaring the recently emancipated blacks.[6]

Branches of the Klan spread quickly through the South, and in April 1867, Klansmen met in Nashville, Tennessee, and formed the Invisible Empire.[7] The purpose of the Klan was to secure the "political impotence and social subordination" of the Negro.[8] To accomplish this, Klansmen threatened, maimed and killed blacks who tried to rise from their subservient state.[9]

Because of its excesses, the Klan's better men eventually began to leave it, and it was officially disbanded in 1869. Even so, criminals continued to use the Klan name for their own ends and it fell into disrepute.[10]

Ironically, the Klan's name was exhumed and gilded in 1915 by the movie "Birth of a Nation," which depicted the Klan as a chivalrous order that rescued Southern women from lust-crazed Negroes. The movie played in record runs across the country.[11]

Also in 1915, William Simmons, an unsuccessful minister, capitalized on the movie by reviving the Klan in Atlanta as a fraternal organization.[12] Rather than riding at night, the new Klansmen stressed in peaceable meetings the values of Americanism and the superiority of the Caucasian race.[13]

Then in 1917 came World War I, and there arose in the United States great hatred for Germany. The war ended in 1918, but the war spirit still burned in the American people, and it was transmuted into intolerance for potential enemies at home.[14]

In this atmosphere, in 1920, Klan promoters began selling the Klan nationwide, offering it as a solution to whatever might be troubling a community. The area of Klan concern spread from bootlegging to violations of the Sabbath--but above all else, anti-Catholicism spurred the Klan's growth, for many feared that Catholics placed allegiance to the Pope above allegiance to America.[15] The Klan's membership peaked in 1924 at about four million.[16]

Klan membership in Indiana grew to a variously estimated 240,000 to 500,000, probably the largest membership in any state.[17] One reason the Klan did so well there was that the 1920s Hoosier was by nature gregarious--a trait that "made Indiana fertile soil for fraternal organizations."[18]

Another reason the Indiana Klan achieved singular prominence is that it had an extraordinary leader, David Curtis Stephenson. Stephenson, by dint of his charisma and organizing ability, became the Grand Dragon of Indiana, a position from which he presided, in effect, over 23 Northern and Midwestern states.[19]

Stephenson turned the Indiana Klan into a political machine and wielded a monolithic Klan vote.[20] Armed with it, he was able to extract from many Republican candidates promises that he could have a voice in their administrations,

in return for the Klan's backing.[21] He even paid a considerable part of the 1924 campaign expenses of Ed Jackson, the Klan-backed candidate who was elected governor.[22]

In March 1925, Stephenson abducted Madge Oberholtzer, an Indianapolis woman, and he sexually assaulted her and mutilated her body by chewing all over it. She took poison the following morning and died a few weeks later.[23] Stephenson was convicted in November 1925 of second-degree murder. His conviction all but killed the Indiana Klan.[24]

Once in prison, Stephenson tried to scare Governor Jackson into pardoning him by leaking to the press evidence of the unholy alliance that had existed between the Klan and the Republican party.[25] The governor refused to budge, so in 1927 Stephenson released a cache of damning documents he had collected, and he gave testimony implicating top state officials in Klan-related corruption.[26]

As a result of the ensuing exposes, the governor himself went to trial, but was saved because a two-year statute of limitations had run out. Several others, including a former mayor of Indianapolis, were not so lucky and went to jail.[27] And the Indianapolis Times, for playing a prominent role in bringing about the exposes, received the 1928 Pulitzer Prize.[28]

PART II: The Methodology of the Content Analysis

The content analysis contained these major steps. First, Klan-related articles (including editorials) were located in Indiana newspapers. Next, the articles were analyzed to see what sort of reaction to the Klan they reflected. And, finally, the data yielded by the articles was processed--that is, cast into a meaningful form.

Locating the Klan-related Articles

The population of newspapers to be considered was limited to general circulation Indiana dailies that published continuously from 1921 to 1927 (the period of principal Klan activity in Indiana). Newspapers on Microfilm lists 79 such papers; of those, 40 were available for this study.[29] From the 40, 10 were randomly sampled for analysis.[30]

Next, the 10 most newsworthy Klan-related events from 1921 to 1927 were identified, and periods (ranging from three to five days) embracing those events were marked off. (See Appendix B for those events.) Locating the articles entailed looking through every page of every edition of the 10 papers published during the 10 periods.

Analyzing the Articles

Each article was coded as favorable, unfavorable or neutral toward the Klan.[31] Also, using a method called Budd's index of play and display, each article was compared to four standards of prominence and was given one point for each standard it met.[32]

The standards were: 1) an article had to appear on the first page or the editorial page; 2) it had to be at least three-quarters of a column-length long; 3) it had to appear above the midpoint of a page; and 4) it had to be accompanied by a headline at least two columns wide or two lines long. Thus, an article could have a Budd score ranging from zero to four.

Processing the Data

The Indiana Klan's fortunes break into two periods: the first, a time of general success, from its beginning in Indiana in 1921 till Stephenson's arrest in April 1925; and from then till it practically disappeared in 1927, a period of dwindling strength and ill-repute. The data gathered from the articles was grouped in those two periods, so changes in press reaction between the periods could be seen.

To represent the distribution of favorable, unfavorable and neutral articles by a single value, a statistic called the coefficient of imbalance was used.[33] This statistic is derived by two formulas, and it can range from plus 1 (meaning all articles are favorable) to minus 1 (all unfavorable).

Finally, overall coefficients of imbalance and Budd scores were derived for each period. First, the coefficient of imbalance and Budd score were computed for each paper in each period (the Budd score for a paper equaled the mean of the Budd scores of its articles). Then, each period's overall values were found by computing the mean coefficient of imbalance and the mean Budd score of the 10 papers.

PART III: Indiana Press Reaction to the Klan

This part of the study contains two sections. The first section gives an overview of Indiana press reaction to the 1920s Klan. The second section presents the detailed results of the content analysis, on which the overview is based.

Indiana Press Reaction: An Overview

Indiana press reaction to the Klan may be described in the two periods that correspond to the rise and fall of the Klan in Indiana.

During the first period, 1921 to April 1925, press coverage of the Klan was neutral (neither pro- nor anti-Klan) about half the time, and the rest of the time it was more often favorable than unfavorable. Furthermore, the extent of the coverage was limited. Often articles appeared on Klan-related events, such as parades, that seemed like puffery from a Klan public-relations office. But there was a dearth of in-depth coverage of the Klan's aims.

Looking back to the Klan's heyday in Indiana, when he was a reporter for the Indianapolis Times and other Indiana papers, Ross Garrigus recalled: "There weren't any big expose stories at all. [The Indiana press] covered Klan rallies, and like that, but as far as getting in their inner workings, they never touched it at all."[34]

John Niblack, also a reporter for the Times in the 1920s, when asked how newspapers in Indiana reacted before Stephenson's conviction, said simply: "Well, they were afraid ... for some reason."[35]

During the second period, April 1925 to 1927, Indiana press coverage focused mainly on the seamy side of the Klan: first, on Stephenson's trial and conviction, and then mainly on the revelations of the influence Stephenson and the Klan had wielded in Indiana politics.

The coverage then was neutral toward the Klan about two-thirds of the time, and the rest of the time it was almost always unfavorable. When it was unfavorable, the coverage was often in-depth, probing the roots of the Klan's growth in Indiana. Niblack said that after Stephenson's conviction, Indiana newspapers "all jumped on the wagon and broadcast all they could."[36]

Niblack's observation is largely true; however, as will be discussed later, some papers gave only half-hearted coverage to the revelations of Klan-related political corruption, apparently to protect politicians they supported.

Throughout the 1920s, a relationship can be seen between the Klan's strength and Indiana press coverage: while the Klan was strong, the coverage of it was superficial and more favorable than unfavorable; after the Klan became practically impotent, the coverage, although mostly neutral, was at times in-depth and was much more often unfavorable than favorable

Results of the Content Analysis

A total of 111 Klan-related articles were coded for the first period. Half the articles were judged as neutral, thirty per cent as favorable, and twenty per cent as unfavorable. Thus, disregarding the neutral articles, the favorable outnumbered the unfavorable articles by a 3-2 ratio.

Fifteen per cent of the articles were designated as wire stories. Thus, for the most part, the Klan-related articles in this period were generated by the papers.

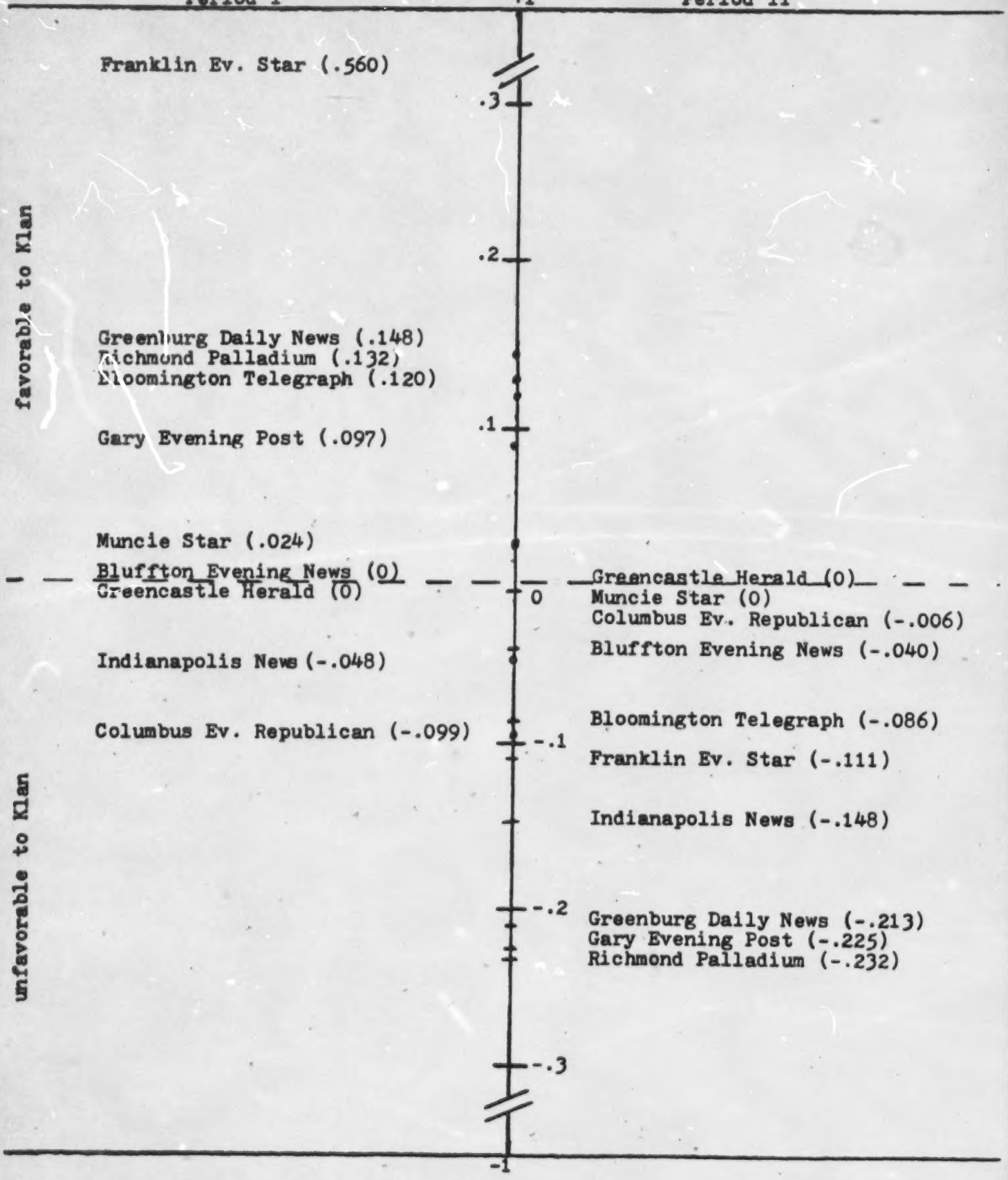
The overall coefficient of imbalance for the period was .123, slightly favorable to the Klan. Six of the papers had positive (favorable) scores, two had negative (unfavorable) scores, and two had scores of zero. (See Figure 1.)

The two scores of zero represent different sorts of reaction. The Bluffton Evening News received a zero because it printed the same number of favorable and unfavorable articles in the first period, three, and thus they balanced each other out. The Greencastle Herald, however, scored a zero because not a single Klan-related article was located in the first period--nor in the second period. The Herald undoubtedly had a strict editorial policy of never mentioning the Klan: for example, it reported the arrest and subsequent trial and conviction of Stephenson, but it never identified him as the former grand dragon of the Indiana Klan.

The overall Budd score for the period was 2.51, meaning that an average article of this period would have met two of the four Budd score standards and would have had even chances of meeting another.

Deriving separate Budd scores in this period for the three sorts of articles revealed the following: the Budd score of neutral articles was 2.57, of favorable articles 2.16, and of unfavorable articles 1.75. In other words, the neutral articles were given the greatest play, the favorable articles were given less play, and the unfavorable articles were given the least play of all.

FIGURE 1



Coefficients of imbalance of 10 Indiana newspapers in the two periods of the content analysis.

The implications of these figures are 1) that editors displayed most prominently those articles that had the least potential for offending either pro- or anti-Klan readers; and 2) that they, relatively speaking, "buried" articles that would offend pro-Klan readers, while giving somewhat greater play to articles that would appeal to them.

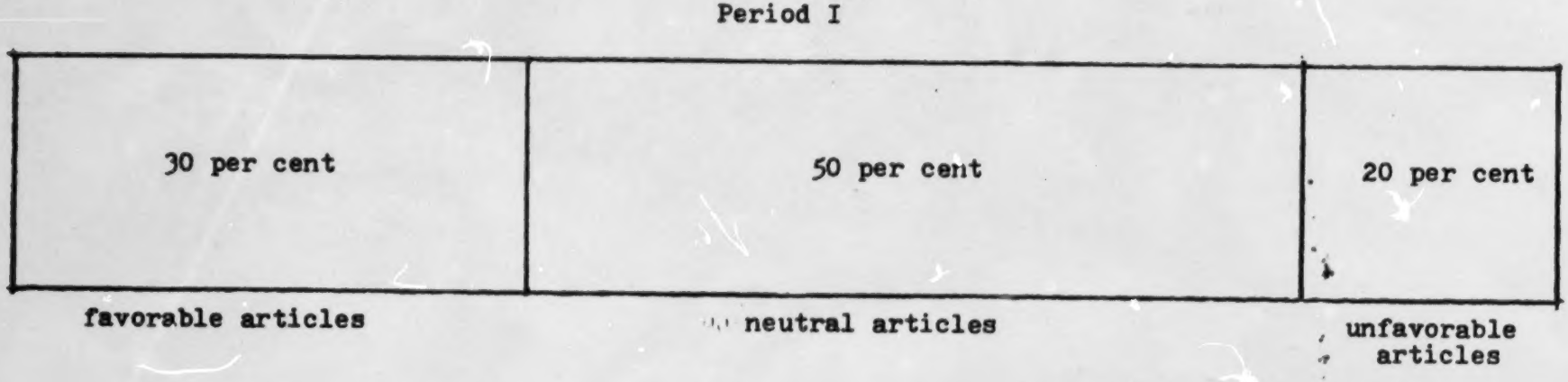
The results of the content analysis suggest that, in general, the policy of Indiana editors toward the Klan in this period was to be more deferential than adversarial.

The Second Period

D.C. Stephenson's conviction in November 1925 for murder was devastating to the Indiana Klan. Press coverage, and probably public opinion as well, changed dramatically. Of 163 Klan-related articles coded for the second period, 66 per cent were judged as neutral, 33 per cent as unfavorable, and only one per cent as favorable. (See Figure 2.)

Half of the articles in this period were designated as wire stories, compared to the 15 per cent of the first period. The reason for this change is that, in the second period, most of the Klan-related news flowed from a few specific locations, such as Indianapolis, rather than being mainly local in nature, as it was during the first period. Thus, papers had to depend more often on wire services for Klan-related news. This fact explains in part why the percentage of neutral articles was so high in the second period, since wire services tend to avoid writing stories with a favorable or unfavorable slant.

FIGURE 2



15 Percentages of Klan-related articles in 10 Indiana newspapers that were favorable, neutral and unfavorable to the Klan in the two periods of the content analysis.

The overall coefficient of imbalance for the second period was minus .106, slightly unfavorable to the Klan, compared to plus .123 for the first period. Eight of the papers had negative (unfavorable) coefficients, two had coefficients of zero, and none had a favorable coefficient--quite a change from the first period, in which six papers had favorable coefficients. (See Figure 1.)

Klan-related stories were given greater play in this period. The Budd score for the period was 3.09, a significant increase over the 2.51 of the first period.

Broken down by type of article, the Budd score for neutral articles in this period was 3.15, for unfavorable articles 2.84, and for favorable articles 2.16. These figures indicate that editors in this period, while still giving the greatest play to the neutral articles, were no longer burying the unfavorable articles--in fact, the unfavorable articles were more prominently displayed than any of the articles of the first period. The few favorable articles printed in this period were the ones that were, in relative terms, buried. (See Figure 3.)

The results of the content analysis show that Indiana newspapers in this period, while not crusading against the Klan, gave significant play to anti-Klan copy. Rather than deferring to the Klan as in the first period, editors often choose to cast it in a negative light.

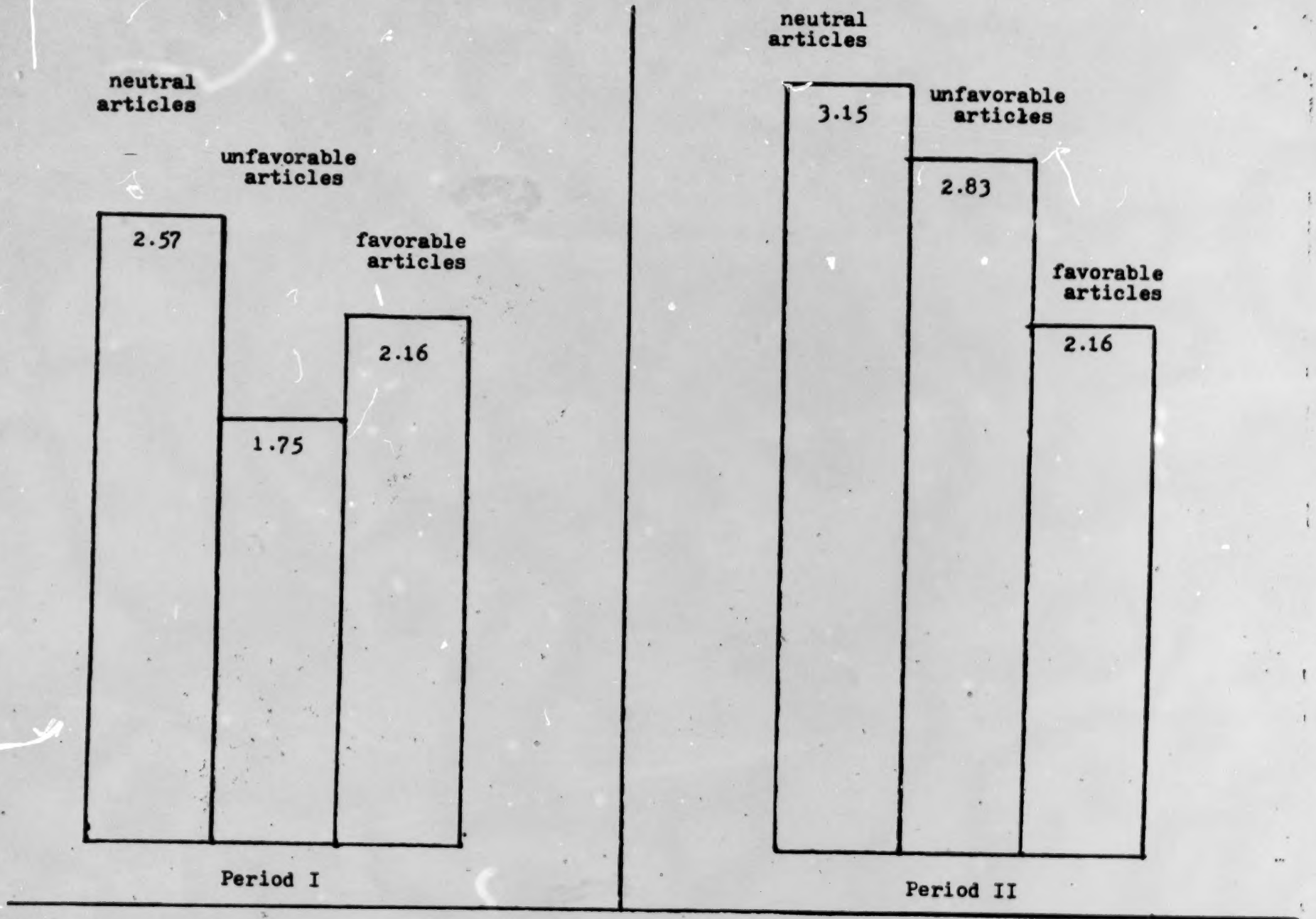


FIGURE 3

Relative play given favorable, unfavorable and neutral Klan-related articles located in 10 Indiana newspapers in the two periods of the content analysis.

PART IV: Why Indiana Newsmen Reacted as They Did

Indiana newsmen reacted to the Klan as they did for many reasons. Some newsmen must have been in sympathy with the Klan's goals; others were no doubt afraid, and still others were motivated by economic and political considerations. Of all the reasons, fear probably had the most profound effect.

Reasons to Fear the Klan

The Indiana editor who opposed the Klan most vociferously was probably George Dale, in his weekly Muncie Post-Democrat. As early as 1922, he was flaying the Klan in strident editorials, and he gave great play to anti-Klan stories.

His attacks on the Klan perhaps became most vitriolic in 1923, after it staged a parade in Muncie, during which, he contended, Muncie police marched with and supported Klansmen who beat up onlookers. In an editorial he wrote:

> ... Muncie is now in a state of civil war. An armed, masked and secret organization has taken over the government.... They are above the law and can insult, assault and even murder, if the victim does not belong to their traitorous organization....
>
> The law abiding citizenship of Muncie has been aroused to the highest pitch and the law will be upheld and anarchy overthrown if it becomes necessary to wade knee deep in blood to attain that end.... 37

The circumstances in Muncie, however bad, certainly did not warrant this sort of call for bloodshed. But Dale's excessiveness probably was, in part, a result of affronts he suffered at the hands of the Klan.

In his paper, Dale told of how he had been attacked by Klansmen: [T]wo automobiles filled with black, hooded

Klansmen assaulted me and my son one dark night within fifty feet of my home ... There was some shooting and the valiant Klansmen departed with a wounded comrade, leaving me with a black eye [and] a badly lacerated ear ... My son was badly beaten by the butt of a revolver in the hands of one of the robed assassins."[38]

Dale also recounted that he received many anonymous threats: "Some came through the mail. I was threatened numerous times with death. I received many authentic reports of Klan conferences at which plans were made to 'get Dale'."[39] Furthermore, the New York Times reported in 1926 that a bullet was fired through Dale's front window, which narrowly missed his daughter.[40]

Violence was not the only means by which the Klan tried to get Dale. In early 1923, he was arrested for possession of liquor, a violation then of Prohibition laws.

In his paper, Dale wrote that he had been framed by the Klan and that the judge, Clarence Dearth, the prosecutor, sheriff, jury commissioners, grand jury and most of the police department were Klansmen. For that, Dearth sentenced Dale to 90 days in jail and fined him $500 for contempt of court. At his trial, where he was found guilty of possessing liquor, Dale repeated the charges and was again found guilty of contempt and sentenced to an additional 90 days and $500.[41]

Dale appealed the contempt convictions to the Indiana Supreme Court and said he could prove his charges. The court refused to reverse Dearth's actions, saying that in contempt cases, "the truth is no defense."[42]

That decision sparked concern for press freedom and sympathy for Dale's plight in newspapers around the country. The New York World went so far as to ask for contributions from its readers to help Dale pay the expenses necessary to appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.[43] Dale apparently was in need of financial assistance. In 1926, the World reported that Dale, as a result of his fight with the Klan, "has lost his home ... and $15,000 in cash. He is penniless ..."[44]

Dale's troubles from Judge Dearth were not over. In February 1927, he published an anonymous letter that said Dearth and Muncie's mayor were responsible for recent local homicides because they allowed lawless conditions to persist.[45] Because of that letter, Dearth charged Dale with criminal libel. Consequently, Dale found it necessary for two weeks to direct the operation of the Post-Democrat from Greenville, Ohio, to avoid arrest.[46]

While Dale was in Greenville, his contention that he had received unfair treatment from Dearth suddenly became much more credible. On March 3, 1926, Dearth was impeached by the Indiana House of Representatives.

Seven charges were brought against Dearth, including preventing by force the distribution of the Post-Democrat, illegally appointing a jury commissioner, and irregularly impaneling juries.[47]

Dearth was tried by the Indiana Senate. In the course of the trial, evidence was produced showing that Dearth had hand-picked persons to serve on juries, some of whom were not even eligible for jury duty. It came to light that for

a prohibition case, 12 women had been selected for the jury, all of whom were members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.[48]

Also during the trial, four boys testified that Muncie police had arrested them for selling the Post-Democrat and had taken them before Dearth, who threatened to put them on probation if they continued to sell the paper.[49] Dearth justified having had more than 35 newsboys arrested without warrants by contending that the material in the Post-Democrat was "libelous per se."[50]

A two-thirds vote of guilty by the Indiana Senate would have been necessary to convict Dearth. That was not reached on any count, and Dearth was acquitted. On five of the charges, however, a majority of the 93 senators found him guilty, and on one charge--illegally appointing a jury commissioner--the necessary two-thirds was missed by just two votes.[51]

It is surprising, not that Dearth was acquitted, but that he was so nearly convicted, for many in the senate had been supported by the Klan. Furthermore, political pressure had been applied to many senators to make them vote for acquittal.[52] Concerning the voting, the Chicago Tribune observed: "It is conceded that the Indiana Klan was one of the factors which saved the judge. The Republican organization in the state was another."[53]

Dale's legal problems finally ended in July 1927, when Governor Ed Jackson pardoned him on the condition that he pay a $500 fine and spend part of a day at the state prison farm.[54]

Thus, after five years, D[illegible]'s fight against the Klan was over. His hardships were undoubtedly known about by other Indiana newsmen, and his experiences must have made them think twice about opposing the Klan.[55]

Klan Economic Tactics

Violence and legal difficulties were not the only means by which the Klan brought pressure to bear on newspapers. Klansmen also hit papers in the pocketbook, with boycotts. One paper that became the target of such pressure was the South Bend Tribune.

The Tribune, under the leadership of editor Frederick Miller, opposed the Klan consistently during the 1920s.[56] Pillip Ault, a Tribune editor, wrote in 1972 that the Tribune "suffered substantial circulation and advertising revenue loss" because of its anti-Klan stand.[57] There is compelling evidence that some Klansmen did indeed boycott the Tribune.

Retained in the Tribune's morgue is a report (dated May 1924) made by Frank Hatch, the circulation manager, which tells of a Tribune sales promotion campaign in a South Bend neighborhood. The report said, in part:

> One lady told our canvasser in confidence that she had taken the Tribune for sixteen years and as soon as the Tribune got back to where it would favor the K.K.K. instead of opposing it whe would again subscribe for the Tribune. She claimed 800 women of the K.K. order had combined to work on the plan of not taking the Tribune, News Times [another area paper], or any other papers that were not giving them what they considered fair treatment in their columns....

Franklin Schurz, now publisher of the Tribune, who joined the paper in October 1925, said the Tribune received some

letters that had delivery stopped specifically because of the paper's anti-Klan stand.[58] Even so, he said, subscribers often did not say they were stopping the Tribune because it opposed the Klan, since that would have indicated they might be Klansmen, and membership was supposed to be kept secret.

Schurz said one way the Tribune's editors knew that many cancellations resulted from the paper's anti-Klan stand was by noting from where the cancellations came. During the 1920s, he explained, white Protestants--the people who would belong to the Klan--were concentrated in the southeastern part of the South Bend area, and the paper "lost a lot [of subscribers] in that area."[59]

Just as some people boycotted the Tribune, wrote Ault, "[s]imilar pressures were applied against local merchants not to advertise in the paper."[60] Ault said he found no specific written documentation of threats against Tribune advertisers. He obtained the information about it, he said, "from talks with Mr. Schurz ... and other long-time employes, now dead."[61]

Although there apparently was no actual Klan violence against the Tribune, there were implied threats. For example, Miller received in the mail a newspaper clipping with the headlines: "Muncie Editor Gets Sentence/Accused Officials Of Being Klan Members." The clipping tells of how Dale received the "maximum sentence of $500 and 90 in jail" for writing that Judge Dearth and other Muncie officials were Klansmen. The implication was clear that something similar might happen to Miller if he were to go too far in opposing the Klan.[62]

The experience of the Tribune indicates that the Klan on occasion exerted economic pressure on papers that opposed it--and probably at times threatened to do even more.

Klan Inducements for Favorable Coverage

Klansmen were conscious of their public image and, to help it along, they were not above bribing the press. Niblack wrote that during Stephenson's trial: "'Steve' enjoyed a good relationship with a lot of the press, as he was liberal with presents of good whiskey and money to those of the boys who would deal with him and some did, though they were the minority." Niblack himself was offered a $100 bribe in Stephenson's money, through another reporter. He refused the bribe.[63]

Stephenson had plenty of money with which to bribe the press. Niblack wrote that at one time, Dun & Bradstreet quoted Stephenson's net worth at $900,000.[64]

Niblack said he was "positive" newsmen took Klan money on occasions other than Stephenson's trial. He said he was told by the reporter who tried to bribe him that "some of the Indianapolis boys had a little of the money, too. Principally, one of the Star reporters, who happened to be a Roman Catholic."[65] In line with that, Thomas Adams of the Vincennes Commercial wrote that the Klan "pays an Indianapolis Star Correspondent each week to lie about me ..."[66]

How common it was for newsmen to give the Klan favorable coverage in return for monetary or other inducements can only be guessed at. Stephenson, at least, had the means and the inclination to make such offers tempting.

Newsmen Who Were Klansmen

Some Indiana newsmen no doubt gave favorable coverage to the Klan because they were sympathetic to its goals or were themselves Klansmen.

Niblack wrote that three reporters, including himself, met with a Klan official to obtain press passes to a Klan event. The official asked, "Are any of you boys card carrying members?" The reporter from the Indianapolis Star, Earl Bullock, replied that he was and produced a card to prove it.[67]

Niblack said Bullock was the only newsman he knew who disclosed that he was a Klansman. But he added: "I think quite a few in the outstate, the smaller cities and towns, were sympathetic to the Klan. Or sympathetic to the ideals, which was thorough Americanism."[68]

A publisher in one of Indiana's smaller cities, Hammond, apparently was a Klansman. Lists of Indiana Klan members were stolen from the Klan's Indianapolis headquarters and the members' names (allegedly) were printed in 1923 in a Chicago-based anti-Klan publication called Tolerance. That publisher's name appeared in Tolerance.[69]

How many newsmen were Klansmen, or were sympathetic to the Klan's ideals? An Indiana Klan historian observed that "many of the best elements in society opposed [the Klan] from its inception in the state."[70] It is likely that most Indiana newsmen of the 1920s were among society's best elements, and were, in general, opposed to that for which the Klan stood.

Still, Indiana's white Protestant newsmen were subject

to the same inducements as others to join the Klan. The best answer probably is that, in proportion, fewer newsmen belonged to the Klan than did others in Indiana's general population--but that some newsmen were Klansmen, in fact or in spirit.

Political Considerations

As noted, after Stephenson went to prison, some Indiana newsmen gave only half-hearted coverage to the revelations of Klan-related political corruption. Some, in fact, even tried to impede the revelations. The story of Thomas Adams' "press probe committee" makes this clear.

In May 1926, 15 editors who belonged to the Indiana Republican Editorial Association (IREA) gathered at an Indianapolis hotel to meet with Governor Jackson and discuss "affairs in the state." The governor failed to show.[71] Before they left, Adams, editor of the Vincennes Commercial, organized the press probe committee--consisting of himself and five other editors--to investigate rumors of corruption in state government.[72]

In the months following that meeting, Adams trumpeted from his paper his conviction that the Klan had imposed a super-government on Indiana.[73] His charges gained credence when the Indianapolis Times published, on Oct. 7, 1926, a copy of a letter in which John Duvall, the mayor of Indianapolis, had promised Stephenson he could appoint city officials in return for the Klan's support.

Following that expose, Clyde Walb, chairman of the Republican State Committee, said that Adams' charges were

"the greatest hoax in the history of politics," and he called Adams a "disappointed office seeker" who had "surrounded himself by a notorious criminal [meaning Stephenson]."[74]

Perhaps because Walb had made those statements, a member of the probe committee, William Feudner, sent a telegram to the IREA inter-relations committee advising the members to refrain from meeting with Walb's committee. But instead of doing as Feudner requested, the inter-relations committee--composed of nine Indiana editors--passed a resolution "scoring" Adams and Feudner for "carrying on a fight for personal revenge." The resolution also expressed the "utmost confidence" in Walb and in Republican state officials.[75]

It is inconceivable that the IREA editors who censured Adams and Feudner really believed the Republican party was untainted by the Klan (especially since the Duvall expose had just been made). Their resolution was clearly an attempt to protect the Republican officials in the state.

Throughout 1926 and 1927, some Indiana papers devoted little space to the revelations. Among the 10 papers in the content analysis, the Indianapolis News, Muncie Star and Greencastle Herald gave this sort of half-hearted coverage. The reason the News dragged it feet was no secret. Niblack pointed out that the News was owned by the Fairbanks family, which was "prominent in Republican politics."[76]

Despite the resistance of some papers, most Indiana newspapers gave complete and timely coverage to the revelations of Klan-related political corruption.'

Silence Toward the Klan

For the editor who felt the Klan was a malevolent force, but who was too timid to give it unfavorable coverage, saying as little as possible about it was the easiest way out. It cannot automatically be assumed, however, that because a newsman was silent toward the Klan he was afraid or cowardly. Klan historian David Chalmers painted a grim picture concerning a newsman's options: "During the Klan's early years, nothing the press could have done would have stayed its spread, and all mention of whatever kind helped."[77]

If this view is correct, the best thing an editor could have done during the years the Klan was growing, say 1921 to 1924, was to write nothing; for to have done otherwise would inevitably have helped it. Some evidence appears to support this view.

The Klan's membership jumped considerably after the New York World published in 1921 a nationally syndicated series on Klan violence, and after a congressional investigation, prompted by such press exposure, had been conducted. What the press exposure and the congressional investigation gave the Klan, wrote John Mecklin in 1924, was a "vast amount of gratuitous and invaluable advertising."[78]

Other evidence, however, contradicts Chalmers' view. Concerning the South Bend Tribune's opposition of the Klan, Ault wrote: "Unquestionably, the newspaper's position was a major factor in preventing the Klan from achieving in this section of Indiana the heights of fear, bigotry and political influence that it did elsewhere in the state."[79]

Bolstering Ault's view is a study by John D. Stevens that found that in Wisconsin during World War I, a positive correlation existed between a newspaper's tolerance for dissent and the community's tolerance. An implication of this study is that communities to some degree probably followed the lead of local papers in resisting intolerance.[79]

Thus, it appears that the exposes of a New York paper spurred Klan growth, but also that an Indiana paper's anti-Klan stand hindered the Klan. The apparent contradiction is resolved by recognizing that Indiana residents were certainly more congenial to the views of a local paper than to those of a New York paper. In regard to this point, it is apt to note that E.H. Loucks, in his study of the Klan in Pennsylvania, posited that "what New York attacked, rural America, with its belligerent inferiority complex, would stubbornly support."[80]

Chalmers overstated his point: he failed to recognize that a local paper's opposition to the Klan could have retarded the Klan's growth and could have ameliorated intolerance in a community.

Whether opposing the Klan actually helped or hindered it is in a sense irrelevant; what really matters is whether editors <u>believed</u> they risked helping the Klan, even when giving it unfavorable coverage. Niblack said he knew of no such concern among Indiana newsmen.[81]

Still, some editors might have harbored a genuine fear that reporting on the Klan might have made things worse in their communities. But if this is true, it is probably also true that such editors feared the possible consequences of

allowing the Klan to grow unchecked. Faced with this sort of doubt, the more courageous course would have been to take a stand against the Klan. The safer course was to say as little as possible.

Evaluation of Indiana Press Performance

Certainly some Indiana newsmen tried to react to the Klan in a manner that would best serve the public interest (as the Canons of Journalism dictated they should), including, perhaps, some who gave the Klan favorable coverage or who avoided mentioning it. It is likely, however, that most newsmen who kowtowed to the Klan or said little about it believed they should have opposed it, but shrugged off the responsibility placed on them by the ethics of journalism.

If Indiana newsmen had been governed strictly by considerations of public welfare, far more papers would have stood up to the Klan in its heyday than the handful that did. But this is not to suggest that Indiana newsmen reacted in a cowardly or disgraceful manner. Rather, they reacted on the whole in a reasonable fashion for men more interested in self-preservation than in living up to an ideal.

Commenting on why newsmen covered the Klan as they did, Garrigus said: "There was a lot of intolerance, and everybody was scared. And it took a lot of courage to go out and fight the Klan. You could get beat up."[82]

But some Indiana editors showed exemplary courage in battling the Klan, such as Miller of the Tribune, Adams and the members of his press probe committee, and Dale. And these men should serve as an inspiration to journalists of today.

References Cited

1 David M. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), pp. 3-4.

2 Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: Maximillan Company, 1968), p. 725.

3 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 139.

4 Silas Bent, Newspaper Crusades: A Neglected Story (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) p. 154.

5 William E. Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 211.

6 Chalmers, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

7 Ibid., p. 9.

8 Ibid., p. 13.

9 Ibid., p. 10.

10 JohnM. Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1924), p. 66.

11 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 28.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 30.

14 John A. Davis, The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1920-1930, unpublished dissertation submitted at Northwestern University, 1966, p. 7.

15 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 33.

16 Arnold S. Rice, The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics (New York, N.Y.: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1972), p. 9.

17 Estimates of the size of the Indiana Klan are found in:
a) Kenneth T. Jackson, The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 237.
b) Norman F. Weaver, The Nights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, unpublished dissertation submitted at the University of Wisconsin, 1954, p. 151.
c) Davis, op. cit., p. 61.

18 Davis, op. cit., p. 8.

19 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 164.

20 Davis, op. cit., p. 126.

21 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 170.

22 John L. Niblack, The Life and Times of a Hoosier Judge (1973, private printing), p. 223. Niblack recounted that Stephenson, after he had been imprisoned, testified before a grand jury that he had spent $227,000 on the gubernatorial campaign of Jackson.

23 Ibid., pp. 202-209.

24 Weaver, op. cit., p. 181.

25 Niblack, op. cit., p. 220.

26 Chalmers, op. cit., p. 174.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Newspapers on Microfilm, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1973. Of the 40 papers available for the study, 32 could be obtained through interlibrary loan systems, and eight were located at Indiana University.

30 The degree to which the 10 could be considered representative of the 40 is discussed in footnote 33. Appendix A lists the 10 papers.

31 The coding procedures and some examples of articles coded are given in Appendix C. The coding is part of a process of deriving a statistical value called the coefficient of imbalance, which will be discussed presently. Its derivation is given in "The Coefficient of Imbalance," by Irving L. Janis and Raymond Fadner, in Harold D. Lasswell's Language of Politics (New York: The Cornwall Press Inc., 1949).

32 Richard W. Budd, Robert K. Thorp, and Lewis Donohew, Content Analysis of Communications (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), pp. 35-36.

33 The coefficient of imbalance is derived by these two formulas (found in Lasswell, loc. cit.):

$$C_f = \frac{f^2-fu}{t^2} \text{ if f exceeds u}$$

$$\text{and } C_u = \frac{fu-u^2}{t^2} \text{ if u exceeds f}$$

where C_f = coefficient of favorability
C_u = coefficient of unfavorability
f = favorable articles
u = unfavorable articles
t = total number of articles

The coefficient of imbalance makes it possible to determine sampling error. In the content analysis, with 10 papers randomly sampled from the population of 40 available papers, the margin of error is .23 at the .95 confidence level. Thus, adding .23 to and subtracting .23 from the coefficient derived for either period yields the .95 confidence interval. As will be seen, the coefficients for the two periods did not vary by at least .46; therefore, it was not statistically established at the .95 confidence level that Klan coverage changed between the periods in the 40 papers. However, the historical evidence presented in part four tends to corroborate the results of the content analysis, which show that Klan coverage did change between the periods.

34 Interview with Ross Garrigus, Vincennes, Indiana, 16 July 1976.

35 Interview with John L. Niblack, Washington, Indiana, 16 July 1976.

36 Niblack interview.

37 Post-Democrat, June 8, 1923, p. 1.

38 Ibid. An article in the Richmond Palladium (Oct. 12, 1926, p. 3), apparently referring to this event, said the Klansmen intended to kidnap Dale and "rush him to a hospital where an illegal operation was to be performed." It also said one of the Klansmen died from a wound he received when Dale shot him, but that "the death was hushed up so that no expose of the relationship between the Klan and

local authorities could be made." No sources for this story were given. But, whether it was true or not, the important point is that such rumors circulated among Indiana newsmen.

39 Post-Democrat, loc. cit.

40 New York Times, Nov. 2, 1926, p. 2.

41 Ibid., August 2, 1926.

42 Vincennes Commercial, July 17, 1926.

43 The World sent him $1,000, including contributions from the Kansas City Star and the Brooklyn Eagle (New York Times, August 2, 1926). Dale did have an appeal filed with the U.S. Supreme Court, but in 1927 his lawyer withdrew it on the grounds that no questions were raised within the Supreme Court's juristiction (New York Times, April 26, 1927).

44 New York World, July 18, 1926.

45 New York Times, Feb. 26, 1927, p. 2.

46 Ibid., March 5, 1927, p. 15.

47 Ibid., March 3, 1927, p. 48.

48 Ibid., March 30, 1927, p. 52. This article also said it came out that in Dale's trial, Dale's attorneys had tried to dismiss the entire jury on the grounds that the jurors had been illegally selected, but that Dearth had overruled the objection.

49 Ibid., March 25, 1927, p. 8.

50 Ibid., March 30, 1927, p. 52.

51 Ibid., April 2, 1927, p. 2.

52 Vincennes Commercial, April 2, 1927.

53 Ibid. That observation by the Tribune was made in an editorial reprinted in the Commercial.

54 New York Times, July 16, 1927, p. 13.

55 Niblack said Dale's case "made all the papers. Everybody knew about that." Niblack interview.

56 For example, Klan leaders in the South Bend area tried to establish a chapter of the Horse Thieves Detective Association, the vigilante branch of the Klan. The Tribune opposed the formation of the group, indicating how the Klan might use it for illegal purposes. Tribune, March 11, 1923, p. 1.

57 Ault wrote that in the article "Tribune Exposes the Klan," Tribune Centennial Edition, March 9, 1972.

58 For example, retained in the Tribune morgue is a letter that cancels delivery because the Tribune's "lying campaign of ignorance and misrepresentation against the Ku Klux Klan again makes the paper unreadable." The letter was dated Feb. 28, 1923.

59 Telephone interview with Franklin Schurz, July 20, 1976. Ayer's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals shows that the Tribune's circulation increased in every year from 1921 to 1927. Thus, any circulation losses resulting from cancellations by Klansmen must have been offset by circulation increases.

60 Tribune, loc. cit.

61 Ault wrote this in a letter to the author, dated Jan. 10, 1977.

62 That clipping, and the envelope in which it came (postmarked March 15 [1923]), were also retained in the Tribune morgue. Apparently, nothing had accompanied the clipping.

63 Niblack, op. cit., pp. 213-14.

64 Ibid., p. 187.

65 Niblack interview.

66 Vincennes Commercial, July 22, 1926.

67 Niblack, op. cit., p. 194.

68 Niblack interview.

69 Powell A. Moore, The Calumet Region: Indiana's Last Frontier, Indiana Historical Bureau 1958, Volume XXXIX, Indiana Historical Collection, P. 557.

70 Davis, op. cit., p. 115.

71 Vincennes Commercial, July 22, 1926.

72 Indianapolis Times, July 11, 1927.

73 For example, on July 22, 1926, he wrote: "The Hoosier state has become the chattel and vassal of an Invisible Force that obeyed a super oath in preference to the oath of constituted authority and showed a super-odedience to the Invisible Empire ..."

74 Indianapolis News, Oct. 12, 1926, p. 1.

75 Bluffton Evening News, Oct. 18, 1926.

76 Niblack interview.

77 Chalmers, op. cit., pp. 294-95.

78 Mecklin, op. cit., p. 15.

79 John D. Stevens, "Press and Community Toleration: Wisconsin in World War I," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 46: 255-59 (Summer 1969).

80 As quoted in Chalmers, ~~loc. cit.~~ p. 38.

81 Niblack interview.

82 Garrigus interview.

Appendix A

The 10 randomly sampled newspapers investigated in the content analysis were:

1) Bloomington Daily Telegraph
2) Bluffton Evening News
3) Columbus Evening Republican
4) Franklin Evening Star
5) Gary Evening Post
6) Greenburg Daily News
7) Greencastle Herald
8) Indianapolis News
9) Muncie Star
10) Richmond Palladium

Appendix B

The 10 Klan-related events, and the periods embracing them, investigated in the content analysis were:

1) The Klan was chartered by the state to operate in Indiana on August 13, 1921 (period investigated: August 12-15).

2) The Indiana Klan was chartered by the national Klan and D.C. Stephenson was coronated grand dragon before thousands of Klansmen at Melfalfa Park in Kokomo on July 4, 1923 (July 2-6).

3) During the middle of August 1923, Klan officials announced that the Klan would buy the financially troubled Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana, and turn it into a Klan university (August 15-20).

4) The Indiana Republican primaries took place on May 8, 1924, and the Klan was in the limelight as Stephenson, backed by a Klan political machine, was able to hand-pick many candidates and, for the promise of Klan backing, compromise many more (May 5-8).

5) The Klan staged a huge parade in downtown Indianapolis on May 24, 1924 (May 23-26).

6) Stephenson was indicted on April 3, 1925, for the kidnaping and rape of Madge Oberholtzer; and the charge was changed to second-degree murder on April 18, 1925, following her death (April 3-5 and 18-20).

7) Following a five-week trial, Stephenson was found guilty of second-degree murder on November 15, 1925 (November 14-16).

8) Stephenson, on October 7, 1926, released to the press a photograph of a letter he received in 1925 from John Duvall, mayor of Indianapolis, in which Duvall promised to let Stephenson approve all appointments of city officials in return for political backing (October 7-9).

9) Senator James Reed (Democrat-Missouri) on October 20, 1926, started a one-man probe into alleged political corruption in Indiana; he interviewed Klan leaders, and some of them were disenchanted with the Klan and made embarrassing disclosures (October 19-21).

10) Stephenson in July 1927 released documents to the Indianapolis Times and Vincennes Commerial that implicated state officials in Klan-related political corruption; among the documents was a check for $2,500 that had been made out to Governor Ed Jackson before the 1924 election, but which had not been reported as a compaign contribution, as required by law (July 11-14).

Appendix C

The coding was done by the author. Three coding guidelines were used to ensure uniform coding.

1. Each article's "slant"--the point of view imposed on it by the writer--was examined. To help determine the slant, the choice of words and the tone of the article were considered.

Here, for example, is an article with a favorable slant, from the Franklin Evening Star, August 20, 1923.

Headline: RAID LED BY K.K.K. IS PRODUCTIVE IN EDINBURG

Anton Bossmeier, druggist of Edinburg, is under arrest on a charge of unlawful sale of a preparation containing alcohol and Charles Mason, Edinburg, is at large and is now being hunted for violation of the liquor law, as a result of raids made Saturday noon in Edinburg, by Deputy Sheriff Morley Taylor, Night Policeman Thomas Bottoms and a Ku Klux Klan investigator from the Indianapolis office.

Evidence for the raids was furnished by the Edinburg Ku Klux Klan and the raids were led by the state investigator.

The slant clearly is that the Klan helped uphold the law. Helping make that clear is the word "productive" in the headline, which ascribes a positive quality to the Klan.

2. Each article's sources were noted. If pro-Klan sources were the only ones used, the article was probably judged favorable to the Klan, and vice versa.

For example, on August 16, 1923, this article appeared in the Indianapolis News.

VALPARAISO, Ind., August 16--National representatives of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan arrived here at noon today and were ready to pay over $350,000, the purchase price of the Valparaiso University, to the trustees, thus completing the sale of the university. Details of the sale were agreed upon last night at a conference in Indianapolis. The Klansmen announced that $1,000,000 additional would be put into the university to insure its perpetuity. ...

Before the Klan officials left Indianapolis an announcement was given out in which it was said that $500,000 will be spent immediately for the betterment of the university, including enlargement, and a similar sum will be raised as an endowment fund. The name will be changed to the National University. It will be operated by the national organization of the Klan. Students of all races, creeds and colors will be eligible to the institution if they have the necessary academic qualifications, the Klan announcement said. ...

Nowhere in the article was a source used who found unfortunate the prospect that the Klan would take over Valparaiso University, a small liberal arts college in Indiana. But certainly there must have been persons who were gravely concerned, such as the students and professors. Furthermore, the Klan statement that students of "all races, creeds and colors" would be accepted is fartetched at best; yet the writer did not get a single source to gainsay it.

3. If both favorable and unfavorable elements appeared in an article, the placement and respective weights of those elements were balanced. If substantially greater play was given to the pro-Klan aspect of a story, the story was probably judged favorable. If roughly equal play were given to favorable and unfavorable elements, but the unfavorable elements were given in greater depth, the article was probably judge unfavorable. If roughly equal weight and play were given to the favorable and unfavorable elements, the article was probably judged neutral.

For example, this article appeared in the Indianapolis News on August 13, 1921.

The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a Georgia corporation, was admitted to transact its business in the state of Indiana today. Its Indiana headquarters are at 447 Limcke Annex, Indianapolis, and are in the charge of Charles W. Love.

Admittance to Indiana of foreign corporations is permitted by law if the corporation complies with certain requirements laid down for operation in this state. Certificates are issued to companies so qualifying by the secretary of state.

Colored Masons in session at Marion a few days ago sent to Governor McCray a protest against permitting the Knights to do business in Indiana.

Papers filed with the secretary of state say that the organization is "a patriotic fraternal order, with no insurance or beneficiary features, designed to teach and inculcate among its membership greater respect for the Stars and Stripes and Constitution and to strengthen the majesty and supremacy of regular organized forces of law and to increase patriotism of the purest kind among its membership."

The third paragraph, about the Colored Masons' protest to the Klan's admittance in Indiana, obviously is unfavorable to the Klan. The fourth paragraph, containing the Klan statement of its purpose, obviously is favorable. But the two are not of equal weight. The third paragraph merely mentions there was a protest, without even saying why the protest was made. The fourth paragraph, on the other hand, gives an extensive quotation of what must be considered Klan puffery. Therefore, this article was judged favorable to the Klan, even though the unfavorable element preceded the favorable element.

To ensure that the coding was reliable, the director of the study, using these three guidelines, coded ten articles randomly selected from those used in the content nalysis. For eight of those ten, his coding matched that of the author.